United Nations S/PV.8090

Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

8090th meeting

Tuesday, 7 November 2017, 3 p.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Cardi	(Italy)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Sadykov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Sweden	Mr. Skau
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 26 October 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2017/904)

Letter dated 25 October 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2017/905)

Letter dated 30 October 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2017/916)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

17-36807 (E)

Accessible document Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 26 October 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2017/904)

Letter dated 25 October 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2017/905)

Letter dated 30 October 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2017/916)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, and Mr. Edmond Mulet, Head of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/904, which contains the text of a letter dated 26 October 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council; document S/2017/905, which contains the text of a letter dated 25 October 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council; and document S/2017/916, which contains the text of a letter dated 30 October 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council.

I now give the floor to Ms. Nakamitsu.

Ms. Nakamitsu: I thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity to brief the Security Council on the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013), on the elimination of the chemical weapons programme of the Syrian Arab Republic. As always, I have remained in contact with the Director General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to discuss matters related to this file. In anticipation of this briefing, I spoke to him yesterday. I have also received a written update from the Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations.

With regard to progress related to the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013), there is one new development to report. As the Council is aware, two of the 27 chemical weapons production facilities declared by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic remain to be destroyed. Following a long-standing delay due to the security situation at the site, those two stationary above-ground facilities can now be accessed. The OPCW is currently conducting a visit to those two facilities in order to confirm their condition. That is the first step in the process of OPCW verification of the destruction of those facilities.

I regret to note that the long-standing issue related to Syria's declaration and subsequent amendments remains, in spite of the fourth round of high-level consultations that took place in The Hague in September. As the Director General stated in his most recent note to the OPCW Executive Council, neither the information provided during the consultations nor the latest submissions by the Syrian Arab Republic have enabled the resolution of all identified gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies in Syria's declaration.

Efforts to resolve those issues have been hampered by a lack of original historical records, as well as what the Director General has described as an

> "ongoing lack of access to and engagement with senior leaders/officials who have an overarching knowledge of the Syrian chemical weapons programme" *(S/2017/916, para. 10)*.

While it is a positive step that the Government of Syria has chosen to declare additional laboratories in their rooms in the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre, the OPCW assessment remains that the declaration of the Centre is incomplete.

On 2 November, the OPCW Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic (FFM) submitted its report on the alleged incident of the use of chemical weapons at Ltamenah on 30 March. Last month, the Director General informed that environmental samples provided to the FFM team, and reportedly connected to the 30 March incident at Ltamenah, showed the

presence of sarin. The report of the FFM stated that, given the limitations in some evidence, the FFM was not able to determine with absolute certainty the use of a chemical weapon.

However, the FFM was able to determine the presence of sarin on samples that came from the alleged site of the incident; that casualities from that site and time period displayed symptoms and received treatment consistent with exposure to sarin; and that munition parts from the alleged site of the incident were consistent with the application of a chemical weapon. As a result, the FFM was able to conclude that sarin was more than likely used at that incident. The FFM is continuing its work on looking into other allegations of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic.

These most recent findings of the FFM are deeply concerning, all the more so in view of the fact that the mandate of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism is set to end on 16 November. Allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Syria have not ceased and therefore nor has the need to identify and to hold accountable those responsible for their use. The unity of the Council will be necessary in order to prevent impunity for the use of those abhorrent weapons. As always, the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs remains ready to provide any support and assistance that it can as we work together to restore the universal norm against chemical weapons and to strengthen the broader non-proliferation regime.

The President: I thank Ms. Nakamitsu for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Mulet.

Mr. Mulet: I thank you, Sir, for the opportunity to introduce the seventh report of the Leadership Panel of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (S/2017/904, annex). I am joined by Ms. Judy Cheng-Hopkins and Mr. Stefan Mogl. Together, the three of us form the Leadership Panel.

Members will recall that the mandate of the Mechanism, as established by the Security Council, is to identify, to the greatest extent feasible, individuals, entities, groups or Governments that were perpetrators, organizers, sponsors or otherwise involved in the use of chemicals as weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. The Mechanism is not a judicial body; rather, it is an investigative mechanism that reports to the Security Council. Despite the very real challenges of investigating complex cases in the midst of an ongoing armed conflict, the Mechanism has taken great care to ensure that its methodology and findings are technically and scientifically sound.

The report contains the findings in respect of, first, the use of sulfur mustard at Umm Hawsh on 15 and 16 September 2016 and, secondly, the use of sarin at Khan Shaykhun on 4 April 2017. The findings of the Leadership Panel have been drawn on the basis of the sum total of information and evidence obtained by the Mechanism, as set out in the report and its annexes.

The Leadership Panel has identified the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant as responsible for the use of sulfur mustard at Umm Hawsh and the Syrian Arab Republic as responsible for the use of sarin at Khan Shaykhun. Before I go into detail about these findings, I will spend a few minutes outlining the methodology of the Mechanism.

In collecting, analysing and assessing information, the Mechanism was guided by the terms of reference, as approved by the Security Council, and the methods of work, as outlined in its previous reports. It conducted its work in an independent, impartial and professional manner. In making its findings on responsibility, the Leadership Panel was guided by the evidentiary standards, as set forth in its first report (S/2016/142, annex). In the cases at hand, the Leadership Panel determined that there was sufficient evidence of a credible and reliable nature to make its findings regarding the parties involved in the use of chemical weapons in each incident.

In accordance with its mandate, the Mechanism took the findings of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Fact-finding Mission (FFM) that a chemical weapon had been used as a starting point for each case and actively gathered additional information regarding each incident. It applied the same methodology with respect to both cases and pursued a rigorous and independent examination of the available information. In doing so, it examined possible scenarios as to how the incidents may have happened, including those put forward by Member States. For the incident at Khan Shaykhun, the Mechanism examined eight scenarios; for Umm Hawsh, it examined four scenarios. That methodology ensured that the Mechanism covered all possibilities and conducted a thorough, impartial and objective investigation.

In conducting its investigations into the incidents at Umm Hawsh and at Khan Shaykhun, the Mechanism collected information from a wide range of sources. In response to requests for information, 12 Member States, including the Syrian Arab Republic, provided case-specific information. The Mechanism interviewed over 30 witnesses in addition to those interviewed by the FFM, and collected and reviewed 2,247 photographs, 1,284 files of video footage, 120 audio files and 639 documents, most of which required translation. I visited Damascus in August. Technical teams visited Damascus in September and the Al-Shayrat airbase in October. Technical teams also visited a neighbouring country on two occasions to interview witnesses and to collect materials.

I wish to mention that the Syrian Arab Republic engaged constructively with the Mechanism. The Syrian Arab Republic provided full cooperation and facilitated the Mechanism's requests for access to information and witnesses. The Syrian Arab Republic also provided the reports of its own technical investigations into the incidents, which were carefully reviewed by the Mechanism.

For its visit to the Al-Shayrat airbase, the Mechanism had a number of objectives, including to verify the authenticity of the logbooks and flight operations records from 4 April 2017; to review entry and exit records and to interview responsible personnel; to photograph the types of munitions flown on 4 April 2017, in accordance with the records received; and to photograph the means for attaching such munitions onto Sukhoi SU-22 aircraft.

Collecting samples at the airbase was not an objective. The Mechanism considered that if a single chemical munition had been flown from the airbase, there was little chance of finding any trace of sarin or its degradation products without specific information as to where to collect samples. The size of the Al-Shayrat airbase is approximately 10 square kilometres, equivalent to more than 900 football fields,

The Mechanism did not visit the sites of the incidents at Umm Hawsh and Khan Shaykhun. While a visit to those sites, in particular Khan Shaykhun, may have been of value it was too dangerous to visit Khan Shaykhun, which is in a situation of armed conflict and under the control of the Al-Nusrah Front, a terrorist organization. In response to a request for a security assessment in respect of a possible site visit to Khan Shaykhun, the United Nations Department of Safety and Security highlighted challenges, such as indirect artillery fire and recurrent air strikes. Moreover, the Department of Safety and Security advised that any possible access arrangements negotiated with the armed groups controlling the area would not be without residual security risks. Notwithstanding the possible benefits of site visits, the Leadership Panel considered that the Mechanism had gathered sufficient information to come to a solid conclusion in both cases.

Witnesses were a very important source of information. Regarding Umm Hawsh, witnesses interviewed by the Mechanism included victims of the attack, journalists present in the period immediately following the attack, doctors who treated victims and commanders of non-State armed groups. Regarding the incident at Khan Shaykhun, witnesses included residents, personnel from the Al-Shayrat airbase, Government officials, doctors who treated victims, rescue personnel and commanders of non-State armed groups.

The Mechanism also obtained independent expert analysis and assessments. It engaged several internationally recognized forensic and specialist defence institutes, as well as OPCW-designated laboratories, to provide forensic and expert support to the investigation. All of those bodies were selected on the basis of their independence, established expertise and record of outstanding performance. The forensic institutes and OPCW-designated laboratories are accredited according to international standards. They were engaged by the Mechanism to authenticate photographs and video footage to verify the times and places where they were taken and to provide independent expert assessments and simulations with respect to items depicted, as well as chemical synthesis and analysis. The Mechanism also consulted with several internationally recognized experts on energetic materials and the medical effects of chemical warfare agents.

With regard to Umm Hawsh, expert analysis was provided with respect to the impact location, the munition, the trajectory of the munition and its likely delivery method, as well as the medical effects on victims. With regard to Khan Shaykhun, expert analysis was provided with respect to the nature of the plumes resulting from explosions and their effects, the characteristics of the crater and their likely cause, the

remnants of the munitions, the dispersion of sarin, the amount of explosives used and the medical effects.

The Mechanism commissioned an in-depth laboratory study with respect to the chemistry of sarin. The objective of the study was to test whether the sarin found in Khan Shaykhun could be linked to chemicals from the original stockpile of the Syrian Arab Republic. The Mechanism sent samples that were collected by the OPCW in 2014 from the stockpile of the Syrian Arab Republic to OPCW-designated laboratories. The study showed that the samples from Khan Shaykhun match a particular chemical from the Syrian Arab Republic stockpile that is required to make sarin. That chemical is the precursor chemical for sarin and is called DF.

As I mentioned earlier, the Mechanism operates in a non-traditional setting. It does not have judicial powers and cannot compel the submission of information or documents to it. It relies instead on the voluntary cooperation of witnesses and those in possession of relevant information. The Mechanism cross-checks witness statements and works to ensure that the information gathered is credible and reliable, through means of verification and corroboration, as well as other measures of quality control. When assessing information, the Mechanism systematically and thoroughly examined the source of the information and whether there were factors that may affect its reliability, such as whether information was based on first-hand experience of the events or hearsay, or whether there were concerns as to the chain of custody.

When corroborating information considered important to its investigation, the Mechanism paid particular attention to the possibility of circular reporting so as to ensure that corroboration was based on independent sources of information. Questions have been asked about the possible motives for the use of chemical weapons in each case. The Leadership Panel noted that it was not helpful for the investigation to speculate, and focused on technical issues instead.

Let me now turn to the findings of the Leadership Panel in the two cases. On 15 and 16 September 2016, two women were found to have been exposed to sulphur mustard at Umm Hawsh. A mortar shell containing sulphur mustard hit the house of one of the victims, who, together with her neighbour, was exposed when cleaning a black substance from the wall of her house. A second mortar shell containing sulphur mustard was recovered lodged in the pavement. The damage to the victim's house indicated that the trajectory of the mortar shell that caused such damage came from the south-east. The trajectory of the second mortar shell found in the pavement was determined to have come from east or south-east of the impact location.

The Mechanism determined that the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) was fighting against groups belonging to the Syrian defence forces from the outskirts of Umm Hawsh on 15 and 16 September 2016. It also determined that ISIL was positioned along three sides of Umm Hawsh, specifically to the east and south-east of the village, which was the assessed origin of the chemical mortar shells. Based on the positioning of ISIL and the forensic assessment that the mortar shell came from the direction of ISIL-held areas, the Leadership Panel is confident that ISIL is responsible for the use of the mortar shells containing sulphur mustard.

With regard to Khan Shaykhun, on the morning of 4 April 2017 an incident involving sarin killed approximately 100 people in Khan Shaykhun, and affected another 200 people who survived acute exposure. In the course of conducting its investigation to identify those responsible, the Mechanism examined eight possible scenarios, including that the incident may have been staged in an attempt to place responsibility on the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic. The mechanism rigorously investigated possible indicators for all scenarios. In doing so, it gathered and closely examined information from a wide range of sources. While expert examination of the crater did not rule out that it could have been caused by means other than an aerial bomb, the Mechanism found nothing to prove that the incident had been staged — and when I say nothing, I mean nothing. Certain irregularities and inconsistencies emerged in the course of the investigation, and they were scrutinized and are described in detail in the annex to the report. However, they were not of the nature to change the assessment of the Leadership Panel.

Mindful of the complexities of the case and the polarized political environment surrounding the investigation, the Mechanism actively pursued unbiased sources of evidence of what happened in Khan Shaykhun on 4 April. They included video footage from two separate sources taken that morning, which showed a series of explosions across Khan Shaykhun, was authenticated by forensic institutes as not having been manipulated, and verified to have been filmed between 6.42 a.m. and 6.52 a.m. on 4 April in Khan Shaykhun;

satellite imagery of the crater and its surroundings before and after the incident; video footage and photographs of the crater assessed by a forensic institute to have been recorded between 8.04 a.m. and 9.17 a.m., and the chemical analysis of the sarin samples that had been collected by the OPCW Fact-finding Mission from both the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and non-governmental organizations.

The Mechanism carefully put together pieces of a complex puzzle of which some parts are still missing. For example, it could not establish with certainty that the aircraft that delivered the chemical bomb took off from the Al-Shayrat air base, or the type of aircraft involved. Yet, the parts of that puzzle that have been established and put together are clear with respect to certain critical elements.

Aircraft dropped munitions on Khan Shaykhun between 6.30 a.m. and 7 a.m. that day. Witnesses saw and heard aircraft at that time and two of them even recorded video footage showing a series of explosive plumes across Khan Shaykhun at that very time that morning. Forensic analysis confirmed that aircraft and explosion sounds can be heard in the background of those videos. Aircraft of the Syrian Arab Republic were in the immediate vicinity of Khan Shaykhun between 6.30 a.m. and 7 a.m. That was established via information provided by the Syrian Arab Republic itself, as well as via information provided by several other sources. The crater from which the sarin emanated was created on 4 April. That was established by satellite imagery.

The crater was determined by expert analysis to have been most likely caused by the impact of an aerial bomb travelling at high velocity. That was the outcome of analysis by several independent, internationally recognized institutes with specialization in areas of forensics, defence and security, as well as two individual experts on energetic materials. While they did not rule out completely that it could have been caused by other means, they said it was very unlikely in the light of the nature of the damage around the crater.

Experts examined whether an improvised explosive device (IED) could have caused the crater. They assessed that a crater of that size would require an equivalent of 10 kilograms of TNT, but generally ruled out that possibility on account that such an explosion would cause much more damage than what was observed in the area. Moreover, experts observed that the metal object protruding from the crater, which was assessed to be consistent with a thin-walled chemical aerial bomb, was too big and too deeply embedded for the IED scenario to be likely. The large number of persons affected by the release of sarin on 4 April, and the fact that sarin reportedly continued to be present at the site of the crater 10 days after the incident, indicate that a large amount of sarin was released, consistent with its having been dispersed via a chemical aerial bomb.

Finally, the in-depth laboratory study into the chemistry of sarin revealed that the sarin used in Khan Shaykhun was very likely to have been made from the same precursor that came from the original stockpile of the Syrian Arab Republic. That precursor, known as DF, is a key component of binary sarin, the kind used at Khan Shaykhun. That conclusion is based on the presence of unique marker chemicals that were identified by OPCW laboratories in the samples from Khan Shaykhun, as provided to the Fact-finding Mission by both the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and non-governmental organizations. The same marker chemicals were found in the DF samples from the original stockpile of the Syrian Arab Republic and in sarin made with that same DF. Binary sarin with the same composition of marker chemicals would be very difficult to replicate, even if the exact composition were known. The in-depth laboratory study further revealed the production process used to make the DF precursor. That process requires a high degree of competence and sophistication, and points towards a chemical plant production.

The Leadership Panel is confident that when taken together, all these elements constitute clear evidence that the Syrian Arab Republic is responsible for the use of sarin at Khan Shaykhun on 4 April. Aircraft is in the air at the relevant time; the crater is caused; the crater was most likely caused by a high-velocity aerial bomb; a large number of persons are affected by sarin that morning; sarin is found in and around the crater; and samples of the sarin taken from the crater are found to contain unique markers that match those of the precursor from the stockpile of the Syrian Arab Republic.

With respect to the responsibility of the Syrian Arab Republic, the Mechanism did not identify specific actors within the Government and institutions of the Syrian Arab Republic. The nature and logistics of the operation would involve a range of actors from different areas.

The international community achieved a major milestone when it prohibited chemical weapons in their entirety. When chemical weapons were used despite such prohibition, the Mechanism was established by the Council to identify those responsible. The Mechanism has carried out its mandate in respect of the incidents at Umm Hawsh and Khan Shaykhun. It is now for the Security Council to consider next steps. In doing so, I ask the Council to also consider the victims of those insidious acts.

Attaining a world without chemical weapons is an imperative requiring concrete and unified action. The Security Council has a unique responsibility in that regard, including to deter all those who continue to believe that there is something to be gained from their use. I understand the political issues surrounding the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic. However, this is not a political issue, but an issue about the lives of innocent civilians. Impunity must not prevail. The international community must ensure that it has effective ways to respond rapidly to any future use of chemical weapons, including acts of chemical terrorism.

The international community, including the Security Council, has forcefully condemned any use of chemical weapons by anyone under any circumstances. And yet, as I brief the Council today, we have received another determination by the OPCW of the use of sarin in Ltamenah in the Syrian Arab Republic.

As I stated to this organ in July, I have hope that together we can end the use of such weapons forever. We must let the gains of the international community be lost. Let us move forward with humanity and renewed collective commitment to end the use of chemical weapons.

The President: I thank Mr. Mulet for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Council members who wish to make statements.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): I want to thank Ms. Nakamitsu for her briefing today.

I want to say a special word about Mr. Mulet and to thank him for being here. One look at his resume shows that he is the right man to lead the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM). He had a distinguished career in public service in his home country of Guatemala. He has served as the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations and as Special Envoy to Haiti. His long list of academic credentials is impressive. In other words, Mr. Mulet is a man very much like the institution he heads — experienced, professional and independent. All of those qualities are reflected in the JIM's latest report (S/2017/904, annex).

Our friends from Russia have insisted that we put off the crucial task of reauthorizing the JIM until we have discussed the report. They tell us that they want to determine who is responsible for the chemical weapons attacks in Syria. Russia affirmed that desire when it voted to create the JIM in 2015 and to reauthorize it in 2016. I share that desire for answers, so let me try to address their concerns.

The JIM has fulfilled its mandate to identify the perpetrators of chemical weapons attacks in Syria. It had produced a report that concludes that the Al-Assad regime is responsibility for the 4 April sarin gas attack at Khan Shaykhun. In addition, the report concludes that the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is responsible for the September 2016 sulfur mustard attack at Umm Hawsh. Our Russian friends tell us they want to ensure that the report and the work of the JIM itself are professional and impartial. Again, I agree with them.

The JIM's report not only identifies those behind the chemical attacks, it also explains how it reached its conclusion. It lays out in great detail how the team carried out such a challenging investigation. And just as any independent team of experts would, it takes note of any irregularities that it found in the information obtained from the investigation. The report transparently lays out those facts, but determines that they do not call into question the findings.

Russia has insisted that it is ready to return to the question of extending the JIM's mandate after the publication of the latest report. "Give us more time", they said two weeks ago. "Give us until 7 November", they said as they acted to protect one of the world's most murderous regimes from the consequences of its actions. Today is 7 November.

In the intervening days, we have tried to work with our friends from Russia in order to ensure that we could achieve a unanimous reauthorization. We have listened carefully to Russia's concerns regarding methodology and site visits, even though most Council members do not share them. We have much that we can agree on. We can agree to strengthen the language on the use of chemical weapons by terrorists. We can also emphasize

the need for all parties to help investigators access sites in Syria relevant to their investigation, and we can underscore the ongoing importance of high standards and sound evidence for each attribution. On those issues we want to work with Russia and find common ground. All of those items are found in Russia's proposed draft resolution. We can accept all of them as a show of good faith and a desire to find consensus. We have told that to our Russian friends, and we intend to circulate our text this afternoon.

However, we cannot put language in the draft resolution that keeps the Syrians from being investigated or from having been found to have used chemical weapons. That is completely up to Syria and Russia to work out. Yet, even though we have continued to engage Russia bilaterally and have made efforts to address its concerns since it vetoed the draft resolution two weeks ago, our Russian friends continue to push unacceptable language that is meant only to undermine the investigators and divide the Council.

The team of experts that the Council created to investigate those horrific attacks in Syria has done its job. Now it is time for us to do our job. Since 2012, there have been hundreds of reports of uses of chemical weapons in Syria. That is not something that we can turn away from. Our concern is not about ISIL, the Syrian regime or anyone else. It is about the people of Syria and their protection. Ensuring that those responsible be identified and held accountable is critical to ending the use of chemical weapons. The Council has created the tool, the Joint Investigative Mechanism, to do just that. Now is the time for the Council to unanimously renew the JIM's mandate in order to ensure that it will continue to do its crucial work for at least another year.

The arguments for renewing the JIM's mandate are clear. Its most recent report has only strengthened those arguments. We must ensure continuity of operations. Last year's delay in renewing the JIM cost it nearly six months of work. We cannot afford such a loss this year when there is evidence of the ongoing use of chemical weapons in Syria. Tragically, there is no lack of cases for the JIM to investigate. Just last week, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons Fact-finding Mission determined that the chemical weapon, sarin gas, was used in the attack that took place on 30 March, injuring more than 70 people. That incident bears the hallmarks of the Khan Shaykhun attack that occurred just a few days later. I remember vividly the faces of the murdered children of Khan Shaykhun. I remember the outrage expressed by the Council. In 2015, the Council came together in a rare moment of unity in order to identify those who used chemical weapons and to ensure that such barbaric acts did not continue. The result of that rare unity was the JIM, which is the best tool we have to ensure that no individual, group or regime is allowed to attack with chemical weapons and get away with it.

The JIM will cease its operations in 10 short days. There can now be no higher priority for the Security Council than to ensure the continued operation of the Joint Investigative Mechanism. Anyone who prevents us from achieving that goal is aiding and abetting those who have been using chemical weapons in Syria. They are helping to ensure not just that more women and children will die, but also that those women and children will die in one of the cruellest, most painful ways possible. We are better than that. We must be. Now is the time to show the world. I call on the Security Council to act immediately to renew the Joint Investigative Mechanism.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): I thank Under-Secretary-General Izumi Nakamitsu and the Head of the United Nations-Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM), Mr. Edmond Mulet, for their briefings on the issue of Syrian chemical weapons. We particularly welcome the submission of the seventh report of the JIM (S/2017/904, annex), which contains crystal clear conclusions regarding the perpetrators of two chemical weapons attacks in Syria, namely, those in Umm Hawsh and Khan Shaykhun.

Ukraine commends the JIM's efforts in conducting impartial, objective and independent investigations. We are acutely conscious of the great difficulties encountered by the Mechanism in its work, given the abundant political sensitivities and concerted efforts by some to defend those responsible for having organized and committed horrible crimes with the use of chemical weapons.

We also take note of the forty-ninth monthly report (S/2017/916, annex) of the Director General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) regarding the status of the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013). Ukraine endorses continuous constructive interaction between the OPCW missions and the JIM, and has full confidence in their expertise and professionalism.

After 20 years since its entry into force, the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) is widely recognized as the first multilateral instrument that bans an entire class of weapons of mass destruction and subjects them to strict international control and compliance mechanisms. The Convention has made a major contribution to strengthening international peace and security by setting new standards for global disarmament and non-proliferation and providing assistance and protection against chemical weapons. There used to be a broad international consensus that the use of chemical weapons could not be tolerated, whatever the circumstances might be. That seems not to be the case anymore. We continue to see efforts to undermine the role and status of the CWC, which is a unique example of synergy between political will and common sense. Justice for the victims of chemical attacks in Syria has been denied so far.

I wish to recall that impunity for breaching the Chemical Weapons Convention undermines the credibility of the Security Council, which has at its disposal all the necessary tools to respond decisively to such crimes. The potential risks and threats that may arise from the Council's inaction on the issue are very high and may trigger very serious consequences beyond Syria. We must remain vigilant against those who do not hesitate to use weapons of mass destruction.

Those who defend the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons through the manipulation of clear facts attempt to discredit independent international entities and create purely artificial obstacles that obstruct the continuation of the work of those entities. All of that has become a hallmark of the Russian Federation's position on this issue. Indeed, the Council's continuous inability to respond to the use of chemical weapons inadvertently aggravates the situation on the ground, which remains deeply worrying.

First, it has been confirmed that the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant already possesses and has used chemical weapons on several occasions. Secondly, the Syrian Government has so far failed to provide full and credible information on its chemical-weapons programme, which is a clear violation of both the CWC and resolutions 2118 (2013) and 2235 (2015). Thirdly, there are numerous allegations of the possible illegal possession, movement and use of toxic substances as weapons in Syria.

That is why the continued threat of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic has to be dealt with decisively and in the shortest time possible. Against a backdrop of such dangerous developments, it is extremely reckless and utterly irresponsible to undermine the reliability and veracity of both the Fact-finding Mission and the JIM's reports. The priority issue today relates to the confirmed blatant violations of the Chemical Weapons Convention and several of the Council's resolutions. The question of the responsibility of those who are proven to be responsible for the use of chemical weapons is of vital importance for the whole international community.

Given the Security Council's strong position that the use of chemical weapons is a flagrant violation of international law, we are of the view that the Council should be similarly united in ensuring accountability, thereby preventing more such crimes and eradicating the chemical threat in the region. We are convinced that in order to achieve that goal we have to allow the Joint Investigative Mechanism to continue its important job. We must therefore extend the Mechanism's mandate without any further delay. In that regard we fully support the relevant draft resolution submitted by the United States as a balanced compromise document.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, allow me to thank Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, the Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, and Mr. Edmond Mulet for their very enlightening briefings, as well as for their outstanding work.

A few days ago, the report of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (S/2017/904, annex) established the responsibility of the Syrian regime for the chemical attacks in Khan Shaykhun in April 2017 and that of Da'esh in Umm Hawsh in September 2016. The report's conclusions are clear and unambiguous. They are consistent with the assessment published by France in April after the attack on Khan Shaykhun. On behalf of France, I salute the exemplary professionalism of the Mechanism's team, which conducts its work in complete independence and with the utmost thoroughness.

The facts that have been established are, we know, extremely serious. To those who claim to have doubts, I wish to recall that it has been four years since the independent investigative mechanisms came to the same conclusions. The Joint Investigative Mechanism has already determined the responsibility of the Syrian

regime and of Da'esh for attacks committed in 2014 and 2015. Today, once again, the Mechanism has been able to comment unambiguously on the parties responsible for the attacks under investigation, after an irrefutable process.

If we stick to objective observation of the facts, the reality is that the Damascus regime has never fully complied with its international obligations, despite the commitments it made. Month after month, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons has continued to inform us of grey areas in the declaration submitted by Syria in 2013 on its chemical stockpile. Those doubts, which focus on the Syrian regime, underscore the cynicism and duplicity of the Damascus regime. That regime has cooperated with the investigative mechanisms in ways that allow it, at the very least, to lie about the nature of its stockpile and, at the worst, to pursue a chemical programme. Above all, that regime has not hesitated to use those weapons against its own people. The massacre of Khan Shaykhun, like so many others, has been a tragic reminder for us. The Mechanism only highlighted the regime's responsibility in that regard, just as it confirmed that chemical terrorism has become a reality.

Now that the truth has been clearly established, now that no one can say that they did not know, our collective responsibility is to identify and punish those responsible for those abject acts. There will be no lasting peace in Syria while there is impunity. Beyond Syria, everyone sees that the future of the international non-proliferation regime is at stake today. While the international non-proliferation regimes have not equalled the achievements of previous decades, let us not let the most successful of those — the chemical non-proliferation regime — be undermined by divisions and manoeuvres. It would be a deadly precedent for the other non-proliferation regimes and an irresponsible stance for which we will all pay a heavy price. The use of chemical weapons by anyone is a moral abomination that goes against the most basic principles of humanity; to look away and accept the use of chemical weapons in Syria without response would be to give a blank check or a green light to the proliferation and use of such weapons elsewhere, and would create fertile terrain for the chemical terrorism that we all fear.

At the joint initiative of Russia and the United States, we created the Joint Investigative Mechanism in order to transcend our political disagreements and to establish the truth. That was why we did it. Let us not then renege on our pledge or our commitments at the hour of truth. The Mechanism is not a tool of the West. Rather, it is one that is shared by the community of nations as a whole, and one that we have the duty to strengthen. That means the Mechanism cannot and should not become hostage to political quarrels, or worse, tactical games. To weaken the Mechanism is to play with fire and to risk undermining the chemical non-proliferation regime that we built together stone by stone. The Mechanism must be able to continue its activities, without preconditions and without any interference.

Let us assume collectively and individually the heavy responsibilities that we face. France, as a permanent member of the Security Council, understands well its own responsibilities. We will not yield in the fight against impunity or on the issue of the full and complete dismantling of the Syrian chemical programme. I call on everyone to do the same and to support the draft resolution presented by the United States on the renewal of the mandate of the Joint Investigative Mechanism. Let us take careful measure of the gravity of the moment so that we can come together for the service of the values, instruments and law that underlie our collective security. The immensity of the stakes demands it and compels us to do so.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Since 2011, Egypt has been following with interest the rapidly evolving developments in the Syrian crisis. From the very beginning, Egypt has adopted a firm position in support of the aspirations of the Syrian people to freedom and democracy, as well as the maintenance of that State's institutions and territorial integrity. Over the past years we have been overwhelmed by the extent of the destruction, killing and displacement that has befallen the Syrian people. We deeply regret the state of chaos that Syria has been reduced to, not to mention the unprecedented spread of terrorist groups in the Middle East in a manner that threatens the security of the region and the entire world.

We have also followed with deep regret the confirmed use of chemical weapons on several occasions in Syria. While we condemn all forms of killing and destruction, we especially decry the use of weapons of mass destruction, which are indiscriminate in nature and harm innocent civilians. We renew our condemnation, in the strongest terms, of the use of chemical weapons in Syria by any party whatsoever. We support the need to hold accountable any individual,

entity, party or authority whose involvement in that criminal matter is proven.

Based on that principled position, Egypt supported the establishment of the Joint Investigative Mechanism and recently supported the extension of its mandate for an additional year. That has been our position, given our extreme interest in bolstering the concept of accountability and uncovering the facts surrounding the Syrian crisis. Our support for the Joint Investigative Mechanism also seeks to contribute to efforts made to confront the urgent threat that the world has yet to deal with, namely, the rapid increase in the proliferation, possession, manufacture and use of chemical weapons in the Middle East, especially on the part of non-State entities. We therefore reiterate the need to establish a system capable of deterring such entities in their attempts to acquire such weapons or the means of manufacturing them. It is important to confront the dangers of the potential transfer of such methods and weapons between various conflict zones.

We have followed with interest the reports of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism, including its seventh report (S/2017/904, annex). We take note of the report's evaluation of several scenarios that were examined with regard to the Khan Shaykhun incident based on the means available to the JIM, keeping in mind the complex conditions in the field, as well as the fact that the Mechanism began its investigations only several months after the incident took place, and it has been unable to visit the actual site of the incident, which is controlled by the terrorist group Al-Nusra Front.

I would like to reiterate that we are all aware of the challenges that investigations in the battlefield face. Indeed, the Mechanism's mandate was designed with such challenges in mind. The mandate clearly gave the Mechanism the mission to identify to the greatest extent feasible those involved in the use of chemical weapons in Syria. We therefore welcome the work that the Mechanism has done within its capabilities. We still see the importance of the Council searching for the best way to ensure maximum access to the site of the incidents by the Mechanism and in a timely manner, and importantly, in a manner that would secure the highest degree of neutrality in the investigation and ensure the security of the Mechanism's personnel.

We reiterate our call to the members of the Council to work towards bringing their views closer together through dialogue, so that we can return to the consensus that prevailed in the Security Council over this matter. That is especially important since the Syrian crisis has witnessed rapid developments in the recent period, which are developments that require us all to support the political process and the road map adopted by the Council in resolution 2254 (2015).

Mr. Bessho (Japan): I thank Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, and Mr. Edmond Mulet, Head of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM), for their briefings.

The use of chemical weapons is entirely unacceptable under any circumstances. There is full agreement within the Security Council on that point, and it is shared by the entire international community. The fact that chemical weapons have been used multiple times in Syria, resulting in the deaths of numerous civilians, is extremely serious and represents a challenge to international peace and security.

The Security Council has played an important role in addressing chemical weapons in Syria. As High Representative Nakamitsu noted, 25 out of 27 chemical-weapon-production facilities have been destroyed under resolution 2118 (2013). That verification and destruction process should continue for the remaining two facilities. At the same time, we also heard from the High Representative that cooperation from the Syrian Government remains insufficient. As a party to the Chemical Weapons Convention and in order to maintain and strengthen the non-proliferation regime for weapons of mass destruction, Japan calls on the Government of Syria to constructively engage with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

In the context of the Syrian chemical-weapons issue, the Council established an important tool, namely, the JIM. The Council established the JIM in 2015 through resolution 2235 (2015), since the OPCW fact-finding mission was not mandated to attribute responsibility for the use of chemical weapons. Although Japan was not a member of the Council at that time, we welcomed the commencement of the JIM's work on accountability for the use of chemical weapons.

In line with the seventh report of the Mechanism presented by Mr. Mulet today (S/2017/904, annex),

Japan acknowledges that the Mechanism has identified to the greatest extent feasible that the Syrian Arab Republic and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant are perpetrators of the illegal use of such weapons. Japan continues to have confidence in the expertise, impartiality and professionalism of the JIM, which are reflected in the seventh report.

The Council has three main tasks with respect to chemical weapons in Syria. The first is to continue to confirm the verification and destruction of chemical-weapons facilities. The second is to prevent the further use of chemical weapons. The third is to ensure accountability for the use of chemical weapons and to prevent impunity. The JIM is vitally important for those three tasks, particularly the latter two. To put it another way, we rely on the JIM's continued work in order for the Council to be able to meet its own responsibilities.

Japan takes note of various discussions on strengthening or improving the work of the JIM. We believe that, if necessary, the Secretary-General can play a role in identifying any possible improvements. In any event, the JIM should not halt its operations while enhancing its capabilities.

The sad reality of chemical-weapons use in Syria continues, demonstrated most recently by the fact-finding mission's report on the use of sarin in Ltamenah in March. Until all perpetrators have been identified, the work of the JIM should continue.

Mr. Sadykov (Kazakhstan): I thank High Representative Nakamitsu and the Head of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM), Mr. Mulet, for their comprehensive briefings.

The issue of the use of chemical weapons in Syria remains one of the most pressing issues on the agenda of the Security Council, as well as for the entire international community. The position of Kazakhstan remains firm and consistent on that issue: we have always opposed the use of all forms of weapons of mass destruction under any circumstances and by anyone. My country has always supported the fight against such atrocities, which, unfortunately, continue to take place in the twenty-first century.

Kazakhstan is interested in the early resolution of the Syrian conflict and believes that any kind of confrontation on the chemical track impedes the achievement of peace and stability in the country and the region. All JIM reports, including the most recent one (S/2017/904, annex), indicate the following important points. First, the use of chemical weapons in Syria continues. It must be stopped and condemned totally by the international community. The use of sarin, sulfur mustard and other poisonous substances has been irrefutably proven by the fact-finding mission of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the JIM.

Secondly, the situation with regard to the non-proliferation regime in Syria not only leaves much to be desired but is also getting worse as chemical weapons are becoming increasingly accessible and uncontrollable. What is of grave concern is that all such crimes might remain unpunished. The international community must make every effort to prevent the recurrence of such crimes.

Thirdly, all of the foregoing once against demonstrates the inability of the international community to take preventive measures and identify all cases involving the use of chemical weapons. We need to work on preserving and strengthening our investigative potential through proper procedures and sound methodologies. In that regard, we consider it important and necessary to continue the work of the Mechanism and support the timely extension of its mandate.

Concerning the seventh report of the JIM, Kazakhstan is continuing to study the content of the report and this afternoon, we are only presenting our initial observations. For both of the investigated incidents, we have a number of issues on which we would like to receive additional expanded explanations. In particular regarding the incident in Umm Hawsh, it would be desirable to obtain more extensive information confirming the involvement of one group indicated in the report in the use of chemical weapons.

With regard to the incident in Khan Shaykhun, we positively note the statement in the report of many circumstances in an attempt to fully reflect the events that took place there. The report fully proves the use of sarin and determines the exact date of the use and cases of poisoning of local residents with sarin. The JIM also invested much work to identify the components of the poison agent sarin.

At the same time, in our opinion, the conclusions about the Syrian Air Force involvement in the discharge

of the aerial bomb with sarin in the Khan Shaykhun territory are not thoroughly convincing. On this occasion, we draw attention to the inconsistencies and contradictions in paragraphs 14, 15, 26, 5, 30 and 31 of the report. All unconfirmed facts in the report require additional explanations and strong evidence-based data. All that leads to the need to continue the investigation in order to clarify the real picture.

On the other hand, we positively note that the Mechanism does not conceal the number of inconsistencies and shortcomings observed during the investigation. That is with specific reference to the situation in hospitals, where the time of registration of victims was not consistent with the actual time of the chemical attacks, as well as the cross-contamination admitted during the sampling process, which indicates discrepancies in the collection of evidence. There are also other inconsistencies present in the report.

We are continuing to study the report, and at the same time, we once again confirm the importance of continuing such a serious and important investigation of chemical incidents in Syria. We call for unity and hope for a consensus decision of the Security Council on the timely extension of the mandate of the JIM.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): Uruguay has always expressed its desire for most of the meetings of the Council to be held in an open format, whenever possible. That is why we are especially grateful to the presidency for making today's meeting public and open to the full membership. This is a topic of utmost importance for all of us. We are not only addressing the regular monthly report of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on the chemical dossier of Syria (S/2017/916, annex), but also topics such as the expiration of the mandate of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) within a few days and the publication of its seventh report (S/2017/904, annex).

I thank the Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, and Mr. Edmond Mulet, Head of the Leadership Panel of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism, for their comprehensive briefings.

During the two years that Uruguay has been part of the Security Council, we have condemned in the strongest terms any use of toxic chemicals as weapons in the Syrian conflict. The use of chemical weapons, wherever it occurs, constitutes a serious threat to international peace and security and a grave violation of international law. For that reason, we reaffirm that those responsible for such aberrant crimes must be held accountable before the courts.

We reiterate that until all of the Syrian chemical arsenal, whether declared or not, has been irrefutably destroyed or safeguarded, the chemical dossier of Syria cannot be definitively closed in the Security Council. In that regard, we encourage Syrian authorities to cooperate with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to clarify once and for all the omissions and discrepancies in the initial Syrian declaration. We received good news from Mrs. Nakamitsu regarding the inspection of the two sites that had been inaccessible until recently.

Two weeks ago, the Council did not reach the necessary consensus to renew the mandate of the JIM. Uruguay is confident that a satisfactory agreement can be reached in the next few days to renew its mandate for at least one year, which will enable it to advance its work, taking into account that there are dozens of cases awaiting investigation.

Yesterday, the OPCW Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic informed us that there was a new confirmed case of the use of chemical weapons, on 30 March in the village of Ltamenah. It has been determined that it is highly probable that sarin gas was used once again against the Syrian civilian population. With that, we have at least one case that should be investigated by the JIM in the coming months to determine the perpetrators. Unfortunately and surely, others will arise. As a result, we must reinforce our conviction that the JIM has been a useful and efficient tool and that it must pursue its investigations until no incidents of chemical weapons in Syrian territory use are confirmed by the OPCW.

Regarding the seventh report of the JIM, which was published on 26 October, we take note of its content and call on all members of the Council to take action in that regard, which should result in sanctions for those identified as responsible, namely, the authorities of the Syrian Government and the terrorist group, the Islamic State.

Since the day the incident in Khan Shaykhun took place, we have asserted that Uruguay did not have the information necessary to identify, one way or

another, the perpetrators. As such, we have expressed our complete confidence in the serious, independent, impartial and objective work of the JIM, whatever its conclusions. With the results on the table, we reiterate our full support for the work done by Mr. Mulet and his entire team. We have complete faith in their ethical integrity, professional competence and impartiality. We encourage them to continue their quest for truth and pursuit of justice for the victims of those crimes.

We must avoid repeating the scenario we witnessed in 2016, when after the third and fourth report the Council was unable to reach a consensus that would allow measures to be taken to punish those abhorrent crimes. Similarly, the Council spent weeks to reach an agreement to the renew the mandate of the JIM, resulting in a gap of six months before the JIM was able to resume its operations. Those were six months lost. It was a serious failure on the part of the Council for the Syrian people and international humanitarian law, and we still have time to avoid its recurrence.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I thank the delegation of Italy for organizing today's meeting in an open format, which allows us to bring the position of Russia on the issue before us home to all Member States.

We are grateful to Ms. Nakamitsu and Mr. Mulet for their briefings.

Russia strongly condemns the use of chemical weapons, wherever it is done and by whomever. In order to maintain the international non-proliferation regime, we deem it essential to identify the perpetrators and bring them to justice. However, systemic deficiencies have been found in the work of the existing international entities in the context of the Syrian chemical dossier. The results of their investigative activity on the use of toxic substances are deeply disappointing. Their mandates have been implemented selectively, without the use of the whole range of methods and means based on the high standards of the Chemical Weapons Convention, which requires first and foremost the collection of samples, interviewing witnesses and the gathering of evidence directly at the site of the incident.

The specialists from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) fact-finding mission in the Syrian Arab Republic did their work remotely. Their report (see S/2017/567) was very mediocre, full of omissions, inconsistencies and contradictions. They did not comply with the basic principle of ensuring the secure preservation of physical evidence. Samples were received on the territory of a third country, with no certainty as to whether they were taken in Khan Shaykhun, some other place in Syria or even outside its borders. The key question about how the sarin was used and delivered to the site of the incident has not been clarified.

We were assured that a visit to Khan Shaykhun would be unsafe, although foreign experts from various States had allegedly been there the day after the chemical attack. No problems were encountered even with the Jabhat Al-Nusra terrorists. By the way, we asked our Western colleagues to share the details of their investigations so that our specialists could have a substantive discussion, but we were stonewalled. When we invited representatives of the Department of Safety and Security of the Secretariat to Security Council consultations on 4 October, it suddenly turned out that they had already managed to reach an agreement with the groups controlling the Khan Shaykhun district on the experts' visit. We should remember, in that regard, that Riad Hijab, the Syrian opposition's General Coordinator of the High Negotiations Committee, had given security assurances in a letter that our British colleagues circulated to the Security Council. And yet for unknown reasons, the OPCW experts did not manage to visit the site of the incident.

Now began the unconvincing references to the power of science, thanks to which, apparently, everything could be ascertained without moving a step. Just imagine a situation where a case is being considered in court and it suddenly turns out that the investigators did not visit the scene of the crime. In judicial practice, this would be completely absurd. We were then told that the Syrian side had presented the results of its national investigation, confirming the use of sarin. Every line of the investigation apparently converged on the same conclusion and so the Director-General of the OPCW Technical Secretariat decided not to deploy a mission to Khan Shaykhun. Our Western colleagues, for the first time that we can remember, all began to make references to the Syrian investigation.

But I should like to point out that the Fact-finding Mission's job is not solely to determine the fact that toxic substances have been used. It is also supposed to study all the available information on the possible use of chemical weapons in Syria, as is written down in black and white in resolution 2209 (2015). The result has been that the OPCW mission failed to obtain

key material evidence. All of its conclusions were based on circumstantial evidence, the overwhelming majority of which was provided by the opposition and non-governmental organizations that have been entirely compromised, such as the White Helmets, who are closely linked to the terrorists of Jabhat al-Nusra. Taking information from them at face value sets a bad tone, to say the least.

Security conditions cannot be used as an excuse to justify the fact-finding mission's refusal to visit the Shayrat airbase. The Syrian authorities were quick to guarantee secure access to the facility and asked that the visit be organized as soon as possible. Under its mandate, the OPCW mission has the right to access any areas that could be affected by the alleged use of chemical weapons. Nevertheless, its leadership did not consider it necessary to check the version of the story according to which the sarin munitions were delivered by Syrian planes from the Shayrat airbase. And yet it was on that shaky basis that an act of armed aggression was conducted against sovereign Syria on 7 April.

We have repeatedly said that the OPCW's investigation could have been much more objective if the fact-finding mission's team had been put together on a wide geographical basis in order to fulfil its mission. Meanwhile, it is a fact that its key positions were held by representatives of countries involved in the Syrian conflict and hostile to Damascus. In that regard, it was impossible to ignore the fact that, right before today's Council meeting, the fact-finding mission issued a report on the alleged chemical incident in Al-Ltamenah on 30 March, based, incidentally, on its by now familiar remote procedures. That is a striking coincidence, especially considering that almost nothing has been heard about the incident for the past six months. That immediately gives rise to a number of legitimate questions as to who provided the samples and when; where and by whom they were taken; how their preservation was assured during this entire time; whether the authorities in Damascus were asked for information; and so on. In the circumstances, one can only think that the story was intentionally timed to coincide with today's meeting.

The specialists of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) for investigating the use of chemical weapons in Syria did not visit Khan Shaykhun either. The decision was taken by the Mechanism's Leadership Panel, which considered it unnecessary. However, the request to the Department of Safety and Security was still submitted, just in case — in October, six months after the incident occurred. After much consideration, the JIM's visit to Al-Shayrat air base did eventually take place. But it is not clear that this added any value, since the team of experts had not been asked to sample for sarin traces. They were prepared to do it and had the necessary technical and human resources, but did not because they had not been given the go-ahead by the leadership. And yet finding out if sarin had been stored at the airbase was crucial to establishing who was to blame and was therefore the direct responsibility of the JIM.

The result of this series of gross errors by the investigative mechanisms is that the JIM's report of 26 October and its conclusions (see S/2017/904, annex) cannot stand up to any serious criticism. It is no accident that the text, including the section analysing what happened in Khan Shaykun, is full of locutions such as "possibly", "probably", "suggests" and "most likely". I would like to ask Mr. Mulet if he really thinks such terminology is acceptable in a report on such a serious matter. Would it not have been better to inform the Council honestly that the JIM was not in a position to conduct a fully fledged investigation? The relevant Russian entities did a thorough scientific and technical analysis of the report and held an open briefing on 2 November to discuss the results. We urge everyone to familiarize themselves with the briefing. Its main findings are as follows.

The evidence for blaming the Syrian Arab Republic is based on a version that states that an aerial bomb containing sarin was dropped from a military aircraft flying near Khan Shaykhun, on an analysis of the crater created by the bomb's explosion and on a determination of the presence of sarin's chemical composition at the scene. However, the Mechanism's conclusions are untenable, since the report fails to provide convincing evidence of the means of delivery, the type of munitions used and the method of sarin dispersal.

Turning to the results of the technical analysis based on our thorough examination, we find that according to the JIM's tracking — provided by the United States-led coalition — of the Syrian Air Force Su-22, the route was in fact to the side of and parallel to Khan Shaykhun. No manoeuvres by the plane were observed. In those circumstances, based on the JIM version of events, the dropping of the bomb could not have occurred along the aircraft's flight path — since non-guided munitions can be aimed only when the aircraft is precisely on

course for its target — but sideways on, at almost a 90-degree angle.

I would like to ask Mr. Mulet why the Mechanism concluded that this was technically possible. If it was in fact carried out — although nothing was observed on the radar — then, going on the radius of the turn and the approach to the target, the Su-22 would have inevitably had to fly over the residential area, with an increased thrust and significant noise. But according to the JIM report, not one of the witnesses saw a military aircraft directly over the town. Our Russian experts have shown, using calculations and graphs, that an air strike on Khan Shaykhun was not technically possible. Why did the JIM not consult Russia, given that the aircraft is manufactured in our country? Then all these fantasies about the Su-22's flight path would have vanished on their own.

The problem is that from the very beginning, the JIM leadership has looked at the aerial bomb version of the Khan Shaykhun events as the basic account, if not the only one. Anything that did not fit into it has been discarded, and the Mechanism has ignored the version about how the incident might have been staged, saying that nobody saw anyone preparing a ground-level detonation of munitions. How can one take that kind of reasoning seriously within the framework of such a serious investigative process? Who on earth would put together such a thing in front of anyone?

Based on information from social networks, the fact-finding mission received munition fragments supposedly found in the crater. I would like to ask Mr. Mulet if the JIM has analysed the metal fragments to determine the type of steel and whether it could be used to manufacture warheads. It is well known that carbon steel is used everywhere to make these kinds of munitions. If that was the case, why is the data not in the report? And if not, how can it be unequivocally concluded that there was a chemical bomb? There is a crumpled piece of pipe in the crater visible in the photographs. What, in the JIM's opinion, is it made of and what does it have to do with an aerial bomb?

Let us consider the crater. If a chemical bomb with binary sarin had been dropped, there would unquestionably have to have been found, in or near it, the mixer that synthesizes the two components that produce sarin, as well as pieces of the tail unit. Nothing like that was found. I would like to ask Mr. Mulet why the crater has no signs of the entry channel that the impact of an aerial bomb always produces. How can one conclude that there was an aerial bomb when the crater's shape is rectangular rather than elliptical? Every textbook on explosions says that a crater like that is characteristic of an explosion from a horizontal, ground-based position. That also corresponds to the distribution of the burn marks on the surface of the asphalt. The edges of the crater were not turned outwards and there were no traces of displaced soil, which shows that the munition was sitting on the asphalt at the moment it exploded. Incidentally, the crater was paved over soon after the incident, which looks very like destruction of evidence.

As part of its work, the JIM commissioned a special laboratory analysis, which detected an impurity that is left behind after the formation of Syrian binary sarin from the precursor methylphosphonyl difluoride (DF). We would like to ask Mr. Mulet what this component's concentration was and at what stages, and whether there was any verification of the likelihood of this micro-impurity's being present in DF in any other processes where DF is used as a basic component for producing sarin. We believe that the impurities found in the samples should not be considered as unique markers solely for Syrian binary technology for producing sarin. It is also possible that the DF and sarin were deliberately synthesized following the known Syrian recipe. The chemicals could have been produced anywhere in order to deliberately compromise the Syrian authorities, and as far as we know that version of events was never considered. Nor has the possibility that homemade sarin was used in Khan Shaykhun been explored, although there could be evidence of that in substance samples. Does Mr. Mulet really believe that no one besides the Syrians is capable of producing sarin based on a specific known formula established through analysis? And if he does, why?

I would like to ask Mr. Mulet if the JIM conducted a chemical analysis of the samples taken from the crater with a view to detecting and identifying traces of the explosive that released the sarin. If not, why? After all, that would be the most logical way to determine the type of munitions and explosion and the method used to disperse the sarin.

What has been noticeable is the visual materials produced immediately after the chemical incident, in which people are seen milling around the crater without special protective equipment. There are representatives of the White Helmets using respirators and cotton gloves, which provide no protection from the effects of

sarin, and they seem to be feeling fine. That is proof that there was no sarin in the crater, since if a chemical bomb had gone off it would have produced a lethal concentration of the poison around the crater. There is reason to believe that there was a munitions explosion on the ground, after which the White Helmets shot the well-known video and only after that was the sarin released into the crater. And yet the White Helmets announced the possible use of chemical weapons even before the Syrian planes took off from Shayrat airbase.

I would like to ask Mr. Mulet if the JIM verified the information that the White Helmets had. Why was almost no attention paid to that fact during the preparation of the Mechanism's report? The report also passes over one very important circumstance. In April, in the Security Council, the United States Permanent Representative showed photographs of Syrian children who had supposedly died from sarin poisoning. The pupils of the children in the pictures are significantly dilated, whereas if they had been suffering from the effects of sarin, their pupils would have shrunk to the size of a pinhead. We asked the fact-finding mission and the JIM to explain that inconsistency, but they avoided the issue. The report also notes that in 57 of 247 cases, the victims had arrived at hospitals before the incident actually occurred. That is one in four of the supposed patients, which excludes the possibility of carelessness in filling out the documents in the ensuing commotion. The Mechanism, however, decided to ignore that glaring discrepancy, forcing the available evidence into the Procrustean bed of the single, untenable aerial-bomb version. I would like to ask Mr. Mulet if 57 people is not rather too many to write off as poor record-keeping.

We are not undermining the authority of the JIM, simply proceeding according to facts and logic based on our thorough scientific and technical analysis of the report. We firmly believe that the Mechanism, vested with such a major responsibility, cannot continue to work in this way. If comprehensive changes are not made, it will remain a tool used solely to settle accounts with the authorities of the Syrian Arab Republic. That is the impression that is being given, and that is unacceptable. In extending the mandate of the JIM, we want to enhance its effectiveness and bring it in line with the high standards of the Chemical Weapons Convention. That is what our draft resolution aims to do, and we hope that our colleagues in the Security Council will approach that draft from a constructive, non-politicized perspective.

Even as some continue to try to find these imaginary chemical weapons in Damascus, the region is seeing an increasing threat of chemical terrorism. Owing to the not very constructive position taken certain countries, it has been difficult to develop an appropriate response, despite the draft resolution that we put forward, together with China. The JIM has not done anything about this, even though anti-terrorist efforts are one of its main tasks under the mandate given it by the Security Council last year. The issue of chemicals continues to be used to increase tensions around Syria; ultimately, chemical terrorism could lead to a real conflagration that would have repercussions even beyond the Middle East.

In conclusion, I want to say that when, together with our American colleagues, we created the Joint Investigative Mechanism, we had in mind the goal of closing a large gap in international tools used to address such issues as investigating cases of chemical terrorism, and we considered the Mechanism as a preventive mechanism aimed at deterrence. Unfortunately, we have not been able to achieve that. I think that what Mr. Mulet said today would strike even people with the wildest imaginations:

(*spoke in English*)

> "With respect to the responsibility of the Syrian Arab Republic, the Mechanism did not identify specific actors within the Government and institutions of the Syrian Arab Republic. The nature and logistics of the operation would involve a range of actors from different areas".

(*spoke in Russian*)

In other words, it stated in its report that the responsibility of the Syrian Arab Republic had not been determined, within either the Government or its various institutionss, and that the character and the logistics of the operation might have involved a whole range of players from various areas. What kind of evidence is this? And then it wrote that the Syrian Arab Republic — the entire State — was responsible.

We need to draw lessons from history. In its current form, the Mechanism represents a serious step backward, even compared to the efforts of the United Nations Special Commission on Iraq, because in that case Mr. Blix and Mr. ElBaradei clearly based their work on verifiable facts. They would not have dared to base it on assumptions such as those that I have just quoted from Mr. Mulet's own statement.

Once again, I want to say that the Russian draft resolution is aimed at correcting these errors and systemic problems.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): May I say that I am grateful to our briefers for their clear explanation of the facts this afternoon. I want to thank the head of the Leadership Panel, and through him his whole team, for their committed, impartial and expert work over the past five months investigating the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

As we have heard so clearly today, those investigations have reached a clear, unmistakable conclusion. Syria, a State Member of the United Nations and a party to the Chemical Weapons Convention, has used chemical weapons against its own people. The use of such weapons by anyone, anywhere, is unacceptable, and we condemn their use by both the Syrian regime and by Da'esh. These are weapons that more than 190 States have come together to outlaw, weapons that have no place in the world today.

And yet we have been here before. Last year we were told by the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) that the Syrian regime had carried out three poison gas attacks and that Da'esh had used sulfur mustard. And yet some on the Council doubted the conclusions of that investigation, an investigation that they themselves had set up, with a methodology they had approved. In February, action in the Council was vetoed.

We now have another report from independent United Nations experts mandated by the Council. The report sets out a clear conclusion: on 4 April, the Syrian regime used sarin against its own people in Khan Shaykun, just five weeks after the Council was prevented by Russia from taking action on Syria's use of chemical weapons.

The Joint Investigative Mechanism has done what we as a Council asked it to do. It has done so thoroughly, impartially and professionally, and today, presented with its findings, we must speak with one voice to condemn the use of chemical weapons by Da'esh and this attack on Khan Shaykun by the Syrian regime.

We must hold those responsible to account, but experience to date suggests that we will not be able to do that. Russia continues to deny what happened. Since the attack on that morning in April, Russia has advanced a contradictory series of hypotheses and claims, moving from one to the next as soon as it is proved untrue, as it seeks to prevent the Council from holding the Al-Assad regime to account.

Faced with science and fact, Russia has had no answer but fantasy and fiction, and it has provided no evidence for its claims. The investigators have looked at the evidence. In their report, they set out the rigour with which they approached their task; how they had received information from 12 Member States, including the Syrian regime itself; how they had scientifically corroborated that information; and how they had consulted numerous independent experts and scientists.

The JIM reached its conclusions not on the basis of any one single piece of evidence. Rather, it built its case on the totality of evidence available to it, as any professional, rational investigation would do. And those conclusions are clear: aircraft of the Syrian air force were in the vicinity of Khan Shaykun on 4 April between 6.30 a.m. and 7 a.m., at the time munitions were dropped on the town. The crater from which the sarin emanated was created by an aerial bomb dropped on 4 April, and, most tellingly of all, sarin found at the scene in samples supplied by the Syrian regime contained the same unique — unique — signature found in the chemicals handed over by the Syrian regime to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in 2014.

The Russian representative suggests that sarin can be easily made, or home-made. Perhaps Mr. Mulet could please explain just how complex it would be to recreate that sarin exactly to the unique chemical signature of the Syrian regime.

In 2013 Russia promised the world that Syria would abandon all of its chemical weapons. Today, to the cost of the people of Syria and to the cost of the international consensus against chemical weapons, that promise remains unfulfilled, and Russia continues to protect Al-Assad and his regime.

I therefore call on the whole Council to renew the JIM's existing mandate, which has delivered the rigorous and conclusive findings that we are discussing today. There is more work to be done. The OPCW fact-finding mission has now reported evidence of likely sarin use in nearby Latamneh on 30 March.

We need to support the JIM and enable it to carry out its important work. The draft resolution that Russia has circulated today is not a serious attempt at renewal. It is a cynical ploy to discredit a professional,

independent and impartial body. Russia is trying to shoot the messenger to cover up for the crimes of the Syrian regime.

To the Syrian Government, I say that evidence has been carefully gathered of the inhuman crimes it has committed. Russia is protecting Syria for now, but the day will come when it is held accountable for its actions before international law and its victims will get the justice that they deserve.

There is no middle ground in the Security Council when it comes to chemical weapons. We must condemn the use of these weapons in Syria and support the Joint Investigative Mechanism to identify those responsible. To do otherwise is to effectively condone these appalling attacks and undermine the international architecture that we collectively designed to stop them.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank High Representative Nakamitsu and Mr. Mulet for their briefings.

China's position on the issue of chemical weapons has been clear and consistent. We strongly oppose the use of chemical weapons by any State, organization or individual for any purpose or in any circumstances. China is deeply concerned about and strongly condemns the use of chemical weapons in Syria. China supports the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism in its investigation of relevant incidents in a thorough, objective and impartial way. The investigation should be based on solid evidence and should reach conclusions that can stand the test of time and are based on verifiable facts.

China takes note of the report that was recently submitted by the Mechanism (S/2017/904, annex). We also note that, as too much time had passed after the incident and owing to security reasons, the Mechanism decided not to carry out on-site field investigations in Khan Shaykhun and Umm Hawsh. Some Council members have expressed the hope that the Mechanism will improve its methodology, strengthen field investigations and refine its mandate. There is consensus among Council members in condemning chemical weapon attacks in Syria and on the need to investigate relevant incidents. Council members should continue to negotiate on the Mechanism's methodology, mandate and extension patiently and strive for a united message. This will help us to find the truth behind the attacks, bring the responsible parties to justice and deter future chemical weapon attacks in Syria.

A political solution is the only way out of the Syrian issue. Thanks to the joint efforts of all parties of the international community, there is positive momentum towards a political settlement of the Syrian issue. The latest round of the Astana dialogue has just concluded and a new round of the Geneva peace talks will begin in late November.

The political settlement of the Syrian issue has entered a new and critical stage. China calls on members of the Security Council to focus on the big picture of maintaining the Syrian political process and to stay united on the Syrian chemical weapons issue in order to create conditions allowing all parties in Syria to reach speedy solutions acceptable to all through the Geneva talks and, at the same time, play a constructive role for the comprehensive, impartial and appropriate resolution of the Syrian issue as soon as possible.

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are grateful for the briefing provided by the Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu. We are also grateful for the briefing by the Head of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism, Mr. Edmond Mulet, and for the letter sent by the Secretary-General (S/2017/916, annex).

Bolivia expresses once again its strong and categorical condemnation of the use of chemical weapons and the use of chemical substances as weapons. It is an unjustifiable and criminal act, regardless of where, when or by whom it is committed, and constitutes a serious violation of international law and a threat to international peace and security. We agree with assertion of the Secretary-General, in his letter of 30 October, that "[n]othing can justify their use in any situation by any users" (*S/2017/916, p. 1*). We reaffirm the need to maintain the Council's unity to ensure that those who have used chemical weapons are held accountable for their acts so that they do not go unpunished.

We take note of the briefing held for State parties of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on 3 October on the alleged use of chemicals in Hama governorate and the presence of sarin and sarin-related substances. In that connection,

we reiterate that the OPCW, its Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic and the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism must carry out their mandated tasks and conduct their work in the most objective, methodical, technical, reliable, supported and in particular depoliticized way possible through an independent, impartial, comprehensive and conclusive investigation.

With regard to the mandate of the Joint Investigative Mechanism, we reiterate that its investigative work is important and that its mandate must therefore be renewed in order to safeguard the continuity of the investigations. There are at present 60 such investigations and they must be carried out objectively and impartially. Field visits to the sites where the incidents took place must be carried out, as long as basic safety assurances are provided, which will make it possible to achieve the expected results.

We believe that the renewal of the mandate should be completely depoliticized, the integrity and independence of the Mechanism should be maintained, the purpose for which the Mechanism was established must be respect to the exclusion of all others, and a specific timeline and a clear methodology for the Mechanism's work must be established.

Finally, Bolivia will continue to study the report (S/2017/904, annex) and its scope. We reiterate again the need to maintain unity in the Council to ensure the continuity of the Mechanism's work.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): I thank High Representative Izumi Nakamitsu and the Head of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM), Mr. Edmond Mulet, for their respective briefings on the reports presented by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) (S/2017/916, annex) and the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (S/2017/904, annex), which we have an obligation to examine and scrutinize very seriously and scrupulously. We appreciate all the efforts that have been made in investigating the use of chemical weapons in Syria, as well as in identifying those responsible for this serious crime.

Our position on this issue has been reiterated many times. The use of chemical weapons by any actor — State or non-State — is not only abhorrent, but also constitutes a serious violation of international law and a major threat to global peace and security. The continued use of chemical weapons in Syria is indeed a source of grave concern, as the latest report of the OPCW Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic (S/2017/905, annex) on the Ltamenah incident confirms, and we join other members in reiterating our condemnation, in the strongest possible terms, of these horrible and dreadful acts. That is why we support any and all efforts to hold those responsible for these heinous crimes accountable on the basis of robust and concrete evidence. In this regard, we thank the Joint Investigative Mechanism for its substantive report.

Let me state from the outset that we have the highest respect for the Mechanism and its Leadership Panel. We understand that the Mechanism has been working under extremely challenging circumstances due to a highly sensitive political environment and complex security considerations, as its report rightly stated and as also reiterated by Assistant Secretary-General Mulet today. We respect and appreciate all the efforts and dedication of the Leadership Panel in carrying out its heavy responsibilities in spite of these difficulties, among which is the tremendous time pressure under which they were working. It is therefore totally unfair to expect absolutely flawless work and results, which would obviate the need for members of the Council to ask for further explanation. It is in that spirit that we have tried to examine the report, which no doubt in many instances is very technical and thus requires some technical knowledge in the area.

In fact, the Mechanism has been very careful in its analysis of this very complex situation. The report indicates that it examined two scenarios in detail. Its conclusions flow from those investigations, but it is careful to avoid being definitive. For instance, concerning the crater in Khan Shaykhun, although the report indicates that the crater "had most likely been caused by a heavy object travelling at a high velocity, such as an aerial bomb" (*S/2017/904, enclosure, para. 40*), it nonetheless adds that the Mechanism "could not rule out the idea that the crater was caused by other means" (*ibid., para. 49*). This is important despite the qualification, reiterated by Assistant Secretary-General Mulet a while ago, that it is unlikely.

Similarly, based on video footage confirmed to be authentic, the JIM concluded that the Syrian aircraft was in the "immediate vicinity of Khan Shaykhun between 0630 and 0700 hours on 4 April 4 2017" (*ibid., para. 46 (b)*). However, the same report states that

> "[t]o date, the Mechanism has found no specific information confirming whether or not a Syrian Arab Air Force Su-22 operating from Sha'irat airbase launched an aerial attack against Khan Shaykhun" (*ibid., para. 31*).

Again, the JIM report indicates that the sarin released at Khan Shaykhun was most likely from the original stock of the Syrian Arab Republic. But the report adds that this analysis "would warrant further study" (*ibid., para. 45*).

Moreover, the report — both in its analysis and findings — admits that there are irregularities and discrepancies. Some of them, the JIM accepts, are potentially important. As a result of these and other irregularities in the report itself, we find it difficult, in all fairness and genuine curiosity, to understand how the JIM could be confident that it has completed its work.

Of course, we know that the JIM was not able to visit the site of the attacks, particularly Khan Shaykhun. Its report acknowledges that a visit to the site could have been of value, but then says — as stated by Assistant Secretary-General Mulet in this meeting — that the security risks "outweighed the possible benefits for the investigation" (*ibid., para. 15*). It further states that

> "[s]hould conditions improve, and should it be determined that an on-site investigation would produce valuable new information, a visit could take place in the future" (*ibid.*).

The problem is the JIM has already made its conclusion without having to visit the site, which, by its own admission, could have been of value to the investigation.

Now, we should mention that Assistant Secretary-General Mulet said that the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic has provided good cooperation. That was particularly true of the visit of Al-Shayrat air base and its examination of the logbooks and flight information for 4 April 2017. The information secured did not seem to confirm the conclusion that the Mechanism subsequently made, again suggesting the need for more work to be done.

However, it is important to be fair to the Mechanism and the Leadership Panel. They cannot be asked to deliver more than what they have promised to deliver, pursuant to the method of work that is laid out in annex I of its third report (S/2016/738/Rev.1). What is expected of them is to identify the culprits to the greatest extent possible, and it might not be proper to require that their conclusion meet the standard of overwhelming evidence or even substantial evidence, but for sure it would be fair to expect the conclusion to be in conformity with the standard of sufficient evidence.

No doubt, they have covered a lot of ground, and the findings so far cannot in any way be thrown out the window, but they are not definitive. This is a work in progress, for which the Leadership Panel deserves a lot of credit. We doubt that any delegation could impugn their integrity, but it is very difficult now to conclude that the work has been completed. More work is needed.

Because of this and other new cases which need to be investigated, we are convinced that it is vital to renew the mandate of the JIM, and we hope we will be able to do so by overcoming the differences within the Council on the matter. It is only through unity of purpose that the Council can address the threat and use of chemical weapon in Syria, as well as end its further use by any actor.

Mr. Skau (Sweden): At the outset let me thank Ms. Nakamitsu and Mr. Mulet for their briefings today.

I would like to start by reiterating that Sweden unequivocally condemns in the strongest terms the repeated use of chemical weapons in Syria. Chemical weapons use is illegal, constitutes a threat to international peace and security and can amount to war crimes or crimes against humanity. There must be no impunity for chemical weapons attacks.

I welcome the report (S/2017/916, annex) of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013). Sweden remains deeply concerned about the fact that the OPCW is still unable to verify Syria's initial declaration on its chemical weapons programme due to a number of serious outstanding issues. We commend the continuing efforts of the Declaration Assessment Team. Full disclosure and proactive cooperation by the Syrian authorities are urgently required.

We are deeply concerned about the findings of the latest Fact-finding Mission report regarding another sarin attack in the Idlib province, this time in Ltamenah on 30 March. We look forward to the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) investigation regarding that attack. The Joint Investigative Mechanism, set up unanimously by the Council, plays a critical role in protecting the

international disarmament and non-proliferation architecture. We offer our full support for the JIM under its mandate to pursue objective, impartial and independent investigations into chemical weapons attacks in Syria. We count on the professionalism and technical expertise represented in the JIM and the thorough forensic analysis it performs. We have provided financial support and technical expertise to the JIM in order to enable it to carry out its important work.

We thank Mr. Mulet and his team for their efforts and for their latest report on the chemical weapons attacks in Umm Hawsh and Khan Shaykhun (S/2017/904, annex). Those were abhorrent and unacceptable attacks, which added to the number of cases of international crimes committed in the conflict by Da'esh and by the Syrian regime. The sarin attacks in Idlib province are particularly repugnant, causing large numbers of casualties, including children and aid workers. The presence of military-grade sarin indicates that all stockpiles of sarin precursors in Syria were not shipped out or destroyed in 2014, as was foreseen.

The Mechanism has carried out thorough work, with all necessary research and corroboration, as outlined in the report. On that basis, it concluded that Da'esh was responsible for the attack in Umm Hawsh in September 2016 and that the Syrian regime was responsible for the attack in Khan Shaykhun in April 2017. With regard to the attack in Khan Shaykhun, the Mechanism has argued that the only one of the eight possible scenarios reviewed to sustain detailed technical scrutiny, using scientific and forensic techniques, is that of an aerial bomb dropped by the Syrian armed forces.

We note that, beyond the Government and the terrorist group responsible, it has not been possible to provide further information on the individuals or entities that were perpetrators, organizers or sponsors, or were otherwise involved in the attacks, or on exactly from where the attacks originated. Our assessment of the JIM report with regard to the technical and scientific aspects is still ongoing.

Finally, let me turn briefly to the matter of the extension of the mandate of the JIM. All members of the Council have pledged support for its objective. As we stated at the previous meeting on this issue (see S/PV.8073), the JIM needs stability and predictability in order to continue its essential work. It is also important that we prevent the considerable costs that would follow from a gap in the mandate of the JIM.

As the current mandate expires in only 10 days, it is key that we now unite to ensure a timely renewal. Sweden will continue to do its utmost over the coming days to seek to ensure a continuation of the JIM and to uphold its mandate. We will support all serious and genuine attempts to achieve that objective and we stand ready to help to facilitate efforts to find a way forward.

The Syrian people, suffering every day from the brutalities of a conflict that has been ongoing now for more than six years, deserve no less.

Mr. Seck (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): The Senegalese delegation would like to thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this briefing in order to review the seventh report (S/2017/904, annex) of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM). I take this opportunity to thank Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu and Mr. Edmond Mulet for their informative briefings and, through them, to thank all the men and women who strive to establish the facts in order to attribute the responsibilities for, as everyone has said, the unacceptable use of chemical substances as weapons against civilians in the Syrian Arab Republic.

As previously stated in the Chamber, my delegation reiterates its strong condemnation of the chemical attacks in Syria, in particular the two incidents under consideration today, in Khan Shaykhun and in Umm Hawsh, whoever the perpetrators were. As a State party to the Chemical Weapons Convention and as an ardent defender of the chemical weapon non-proliferation regime, Senegal, through me, reiterates its conviction that nothing can justify an atrocity such as the use of chemical substances as a weapon against civilians by anyone and under any circumstances.

Not only such attacks but also the many and ongoing allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Syria highlighted by the report and by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic demonstrate — if any further proof were necessary — how important it is that the JIM continue its work, which acts also as an instrument of deterrence, since the risk of weapons of mass destruction falling into the hands of non-State actors, such as terrorist groups, is real. That is of particular concern to Senegal.

On behalf of my country, I therefore takes this opportunity to welcome the positive cooperation, in accordance with resolution 2319 (2016), between the

Mechanism and other subsidiary bodies of the Council, including the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1540 (2004) and the Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida, and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities. Senegal also welcomes the cooperation of certain Member States with the Mechanism as part of its investigative work.

Whatever our views on the report under review, my delegation believes that there is still sufficient common ground among members of the Security Council to allow us to renew the mandate of the Joint Investigative Mechanism, which expires in only 10 days, as my neighbour has just reminded the Council. I would like to express the hope that the Council will regain the spirit of compromise and consensus on this highly technical issue, as in the case with the adoption of resolutions 2118 (2013), 2235 (2015) and 2319 (2016), all of which enabled the Council to make tangible progress in tackling the issue of chemical weapons in Syria.

In any case, since my delgation is convinced not only of the crucial contribution of the JIM in establishing the truth with regard to the use of chemical weapons in Syria, but also of the relevance of the lessons to be drawn, in particular regarding the global non-proliferation architecture, my delegation reiterates its great appreciation of and support for the Mechanism. We would encourage the Mechanism to continue its crucial mission, which seeks to discharge — it should be underscored — independently, impartially and objectively its mandate established under resolution 2235 (2015) and renewed by the Council through resolution 2319 (2016). It is important to recall that the mandate comprises identifying, to the extent possible, the individuals, entities or Governments that have perpetrated, organized or ordered the use as weapons of chemical substances, including chlorine, sarin and any other toxic chemical substance, in the Syrian Arab Republic or those who have participated in any way. Since everyone agrees that chemical weapons have been used in Syria and given that there are further allegations that have not yet been verified, Senegal believes that the Security Council can reach agreement on renewing the mandate of the JIM.

To conclude, I would like to reiterate the importance of finding a negotiated political solution to the Syrian conflict on the basis of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2015) as the only viable solution in order to overcome the significant humanitarian challenges spawned by the conflict and to shed all possible light on the many allegations of the use of prohibited weapons in Syria.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Italy.

I would first of all like to thank Ms. Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, and Mr. Edmond Mulet for their briefings. They have the full support of the Security Council in their undertaking, which is crucial to upholding the international security architecture.

We thank the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) for its seventh report (S/2017/904, annex), which is the result of an investigation that was conducted in the framework of a very complex security challenge and constraint. Italy supports the work of the Joint Investigative Mechanism. We hold its professionalism and independence in high regard and trust.

Italy is deeply concerned about the findings of the report, as they again affirm that chemical weapons have been used in Syria. To date, the JIM has verified four chemical attacks by the Syrian armed forces and two attacks by Da'esh. What happened in Khan Shaykhun in April 2017 and in Umm Hawsh in September 2016 is totally unacceptable and confirms the abysmal scale of human suffering in the Syrian conflict. We condemn it in the strongest terms. These episodes are a tragic reminder that international law, including the Council's resolutions, as well as the international non-proliferation architecture, continue to be blatantly violated in Syria by the Government and by the terrorists, further eroding — as emphasized by the Secretary-General in his latest report (S/2017/902) — the taboo against chemical weapons.

As long as nobody is held accountable for those acts, the risk of their recurrence will remain and even grow. Allegations of new incidents involving the use of sarin keep emerging, as examined by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Fact-finding Mission with regard to the incident in Ltamenah. It is one more reason why fighting impunity, identifying the perpetrators and holding them accountable must be shared priorities of the Council. It is one more reason to renew the mandate of the JIM, which will soon expire.

On the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013), we are disappointed that the recent high-level consultations between the OPCW and Syria in September were unable to achieve any significant progress. As the global non-proliferation architecture continues to face extremely serious challenges, the Security Council has the responsibility of defending the integrity and credibility of these crucial long-standing norms of our collective security, and preserving the means of prevention and pathways for accountability in case of violations. The OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism is a critical tool in that respect, and Italy fully supported the renewal of its mandate two weeks ago, mindful of the need to preserve its expertise, protect its independence and uphold the credibility of its investigations.

We are committed to engaging with other Council members to achieve consensus on such a pressing objective, and we would like to thank the penholder — the United States delegation — for its constructive efforts in pursuing a consensual solution, including through a draft resolution that we consider to be a very good basis for discussions leading to preserve the unity of the Council.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I gove the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important meeting. We would also like to thank our colleagues, who have clearly pointed out the shortcomings that beset the report under consideration (S/2017/904, annex).

I note in particular Mr. Mulet's statement in his briefing to the effect that his mandate and that of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) to investigate the incident in Khan Shaykhun is not a political matter. He said that it is not a political issue. The strange contradiction is that, in that same briefing, Mr. Mulet expressed his opinion that the use of chemicals in Khan Shaykhun was an instance of chemical terrorism.

My question to Mr. Mulet and the members of the Council is: Since when is chemical terrorism considered to be a strictly technical and non-political issue? Saying that the JIM's mandate is a strictly technical part of work to be undertaken in a complex political atmosphere, as my dear friend the Ethiopian Ambassador has said, is akin to some lazy students in school saying that focusing on physical education alone is enough to succeed in education, and that there is no need to study the rest of the curriculum.

How can the head of the JIM say that the information concerning the use by terrorist groups of chemical weapons and the smuggling of such weapons through neighbouring States — which was information submitted by my country's Government to him, to the Fact-finding Mission before him, to the counter-terrorism committees before that, to the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1540 (2004) before that, and to the Security Council as a whole, in 130 letters on the use of chemical weapons and their smuggling through neighbouring States by terrorist groups in Syria — is a strictly technical matter? We submitted 130 letters amounting to practically a book, from 6 November 2012 to 6 November 2017 — five year exactly. All of these letters concern the use of chemicals by armed terrorist groups in my country. Then comes Mr Mulet to say that all the crimes that we sent him information about, and that have killed thousands of Syrians, are strictly a technical matter rather than a political one. His briefing was completely devoid of any understanding of the complex political scene in my country. The Mechanism's mandate cannot be strictly technical. That is not convincing proof.

Machiavelli — who was from your country, Mr. President — said nearly 500 years ago, "Politics have no relation to morals". This is what was said by Machiavelli. I can almost see him today observing the behaviour of the Governments of some States that proclaim their morality and declare themselves the guardians of respect for international law and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, while they themselves practice policies that belittle those very same noble principles and misuse them in order to further their destructive and interventionist agendas. I can almost see Machiavelli here today, standing and observing the behaviour of some United Nations committees that are supposed to be neutral, professional and credible, while their work and reports prove that they are biased, politicized and immoral. They excel in using false witnesses, sources they call "open" and fabricated evidence.

That is the state of the Fact-finding Mission and the Joint Investigative Mechanism, whose report we are discussing today. I will prove to the Council right now, with scientific and legal evidence, that the report is not neutral or professional and that its wrongful accusations against Syria are based on fabricated evidence and manipulated information. It has used sly remarks and ambiguous statements that no criminal report should use in forming its allegations.

Let us refer to the report to count how many times the report uses the words "likely" and "unlikely" in discussing scientific evidence that must only be cited with certainty. I will save the Council the effort. Those two words "likely" and "unlikely" are used 32 times. Despite that fact, the JIM's leadership found no problem in using the word "confident" in its conclusions to point a finger of accusation at Syria regarding the Khan Shaykhun incident, despite the fact that the investigation was partial and ignored and manipulated the three main pillars of any criminal investigation.In that respect, I should like to make the following points.

First, paragraph 54 of the Mechanism's report states that the Syrian Arab Republic has not provided the Mechanism with the outcomes of the internal investigation conducted by the Syrian national committee. This is what the paragraph says, and in that regard I would like to pose the following question directly to Mr. Mulet, who is seated right next to me, doodling. What are the documents that I myself handed to him during the meeting we had in his office on 16 August? Early on the morning of that day, 16 August, I met urgently with Mr. Mulet in his office at my request, in order to provide him with a copy of the Syrian national committee's report on its investigation into the Khan Shaykhun incident. I personally informed him that he is the only United Nations official with a copy of that report.

Second, on several occasions, the report states that the Al-Nusra Front is primarily in control of the city of Khan Shaykhun, including the crime scene. The report therefore candidly states that the Al-Nusra Front terrorists fabricated and transported the evidence to Turkey; that the Al-Nusra terrorists allegedly sent samples to the French, British, Turkish and American intelligence services, and provided false witnesses in the Turkish town of Gaziantep; and that the Al-Nusra Front terrorists also staged and manipulated then concealed the crime scene. In the light of such information, how is it possible for the Mechanism's leadership to be sure that the conclusions it has drawn, based on the so-called the chain of custody, were not manipulated by the Al-Nusra Front, which has been classified by the Council as a terrorist organization? The Al-Nusra Front is a terrorist organization and it has more credibility with Mr. Mulet than the Syrian Government.

Third, paragraph 9 of annex II of the report notes that, on 21 March, the Al-Nusra Front and its affiliate groups launched an offensive against forces of the Syrian Arab Republic in the direction of Hama city. The report states that, by 3 April, the Syrian army regained control of and moved deeper into areas that had been lost. That means that it occurred until one day before the Khan Shaykhun incident — just one day. My question to everyone is this. If the Syrian army was achieving decisive victories, as the report states, and was at the gates of Khan Shaykhun, which was under the control of the terrorist Al-Nusra Front, just one day before the incident took place, why stage a crime with such well-known repercussions? Why would chemical agents be used? Who would truly benefit from it? The only party that benefits is the terrorist Al-Nusra Front, and the Governments of the States that level accusations at the Syrian Government, whose goal is to obstruct the progress of the Syrian army against terrorists who have been genetically modified into moderate terrorists, as their sponsors like to call them. Some believe that the Al-Nusra Front is a moderate terrorist organization.

Fourth, why did the Fact-finding Mission and the JIM not visit the crime scene in Khan Shaykhun? Can a crime be investigated remotely, like a PlaySation game, without visiting the scene of the crime? Let us bear in mind that, as stated by my colleague of the Russian Federation, the United Nations Department of Safety and Security confirmed the possibility of conducting such a visit. In that regard, I would like to recall that there is a pattern of not visiting the crime scene, which is nothing new to the Mechanism. To date, the United Nations has not acquiesced to the request made by the Syrian Government on 22 June 2013 to investigate the crime of the use by terrorist armed groups of chemical weapons in Khan Al-Asal, despite the fact that former Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, had sent Mr. Sellström to investigate. Five years have passed — I repeat, five years — and the Khan Al-Asal incident has not been investigated.

Fifth, why did the Al-Nusra Front, which controls Khan Shaykhun, rush to cover the crater with asphalt, and why did it tamper with the crime scene? If the

sponsors of that terrorist organization had nothing to hide, would it not have been better for them to facilitate the investigation and prevent the crime scene from being compromised?

Sixth, why did the JIM not collect samples from the Al-Shayrat air base, which the United States Administration claimed was the launch point of the chemical attack? It is an interesting paradox that Mr. Mulet himself told me that he decided not to go to Khan Shaykhun, and that it was not within the Mechanism's mandate to take samples from the Al-Shayrat air base. I ask the members of the Council an important question: What could have caused Mr. Mulet to make those serious decisions, which would affect the credibility of the Mechanism's conclusions? All of those questions would surely have caused Britain's Alfred Hitchcock to be outraged.

Seventh, paragraph 30 of the report notes that the Mechanism had received information about an aircraft that was located 5 kilometres of Khan Shaykhun. It states that the expert it consulted concluded that, depending on a number of variables, such as altitude, speed and flight path taken, it would be possible for such an aerial bomb to be dropped on the town from the aforementioned distance. Despite the fact that, from a technical perspective, it is impossible for a Su-22 to deliver a strike to the town, according to the flight path determined by the Mechanism, the expert consulted by the Mechanism used a conniving, misleading and inconclusive expression. He stated that it would be possible to deliver a strike — and here we go back to the words "unlikely" and "likely" — and the Mechanism rushed to adopt that conclusion. An expert stated that it was possible, and the Mechanism immediately latched onto that assertion without challenging it.

Eighth, paragraph 41 of the report states,

> "The Mechanism also examined whether an improvised explosive device could have caused the crater. While that possibility could not be completely ruled out...".

Would the Mechanism's leadership explain how it does not dismiss the fact that the crater could have been caused by an improvised explosive device, while also stating that it is confident that the crater was caused by the impact of an aerial bomb? How do we reconcile those two assertions? On the one hand, they say that the crater could have been caused by an improvised explosive device, yet on the other they say that the crater was caused by an aerial bomb.

Ninth, paragraph 45 of the report notes that some of the evidence that was used to level accusations at the Syrian Government were samples of a precursor chemical, known as methylphosphonyl difluoride (DF), from the original stock from the Syrian Arab Republic. I ask the leadership of the Mechanism: Why does it insist on misleading those who read the report by giving the impression that that sample is as reliable as a DNA sample, and that it can be manufactured only by the Syrian Government? Any specialized Western laboratory could manufacture such a sample. Are Syrian scientists the only ones able to create the DF precursor? Can it be manufactured only in Syria?

I would like to remind members of the Council that the Syrian chemical stock was destroyed on-board the United States vessel *MV Cape Ray*, in the Mediterranean. It is therefore likely that the party that destroyed the stock has kept part of it, because they cannot manufacture what our scientists are able to produce. That kind of DF is a strictly Syrian brand that only Syrian scientists can manufacture. Americans are unable to create anything like it, so they may have kept part of the Syrian stock that they were tasked with destroying in the Mediterranean. American scientists learn from our scientists when it comes to chemistry.

Tenth, does the absence of a tailfin at the crime scene, as stated in paragraph 58 of the report, not indicate that a certain party manipulated the scene to create the impression that an aerial bomb had been dropped? The Mechanism itself has stated that "the absence of a chain of custody relating to the munition remnants diminishes their probative value" (*S/2017/904, annex, para. 58*). However, that did not prevent the Mechanism from concluding that the incident was the result of an aerial bomb.

Eleventh, from paragraphs 74 to 79 of the report, the Mechanism notes that there is a conflict between information and witness testimonies, as well as unusual and inappropriate measures that were taken. I would like to give just one example to demonstrate the degree of manipulation regarding the incident. The report states that

> "In sample No. 13, the blood sample tested negative for sarin or a sarin-like substance, while the urine sample tested positive for the sarin degradation

product isopropyl methylphosphonate" (*ibid., para. 78*).

The report adds that

> "Medical experts consulted by the Mechanism indicated that the combination of the negative result in the blood and the positive result in the urine was impossible" (*ibid.*).

However, the Mechanism insisted that the aforementioned proves the use of sarin. It is scientifically impossible for sarin to be absent from someone's blood and present in that same person's urine — that is medically impossible.

Despite all of those contradictions, the report acknowledges that the Mechanism's leadership did not make any effort to uncover the reasons behind them, even though the reason is quite clear — to manipulate evidence and information, in order to make accusations against the Syrian Government, as was the case with the conclusions of the Mechanism's former leadership in its third and fourth reports. Those reports' misleading conclusions were used by the American administration to attack Al-Shayrat air base.

I call on members of the Council to employ logic and good judgment, and to seek clear and real answers to the questions that I have just posed, which have also been posed by other colleagues. Syria reaffirms that it abides by the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction. Since it exceeded to the Convention in 2013, it has possessed no banned toxic chemical supplies, as confirmed by Ms. Sigrid Kaag, Head of the Joint Mission of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the United Nations for the Elimination of the Chemical Weapons Programme of the Syrian Arab Republic, in her report to the Council that was submitted in June 2014 (S/2014/444, annex).

My country considers the use of chemical weapons to be an immoral act that must be condemned, regardless of where, when and under what conditions they are used. This report's prefabricated conclusions are the final nail in the coffin, which exposes the real motives of the sponsors of terrorism. The degree that those sponsors have manipulated reality and the facts in this report is unprecedented, and far exceeds the manipulation that this Chamber witnessed on 5 February 2003 (see S/PV.4701).

Such failed diplomacy is now being repeated in another pathetic scene, reminding the world of the fabricated claims that were made by Secretary of State Powell in a meeting that I personally attended in this very Chamber on 5 February 2003, when Mr. Powell submitted evidence that he called "[f]acts and conclusions based on solid intelligence" (*S/PV.4701, p. 5*). He used those words to justify his country's aggression in Iraq, under the pretext that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. It is truly bizarre that his colleague, Secretary of State Kerry, returned to this Chamber on 27 September 2013 to use that very same expression to mislead the international community and to justify an aggression in Syria at the time (see S/PV.7038). Secretary of State Kerry used the same words as Secretary Powell. It seems that that syndrome is the exclusive property of consecutive United States administrations.

Allow me to now think out loud and seek an answer to the question that concerns every Syrian. How long will Syrians continue to suffer from the terrorism that is being backed by Western Governments, which view the United Nations and the Security Council only as an iron fist to further their interests or commercial enterprises and achieve their goals. Governments of the force of law have committed every kind of unlawful act against the Syrian people and continue to believe that they can kill, destroy, deceive and prevaricate without any judicial accountability.

What is the use of having our Organization if the Governments of those States continue to use it to bear false witness and shatter entire States, such as Yugoslavia, Iraq and Libya; besiege, starve and kill entire peoples, as in Palestine and Yemen; impose illegal sanctions on countries, such as Cuba, Venezuela and Iran; and bring a dirty terrorist war to my country, Syria. The list goes on.

To conclude, the terrorist war that has targeted Syria has cost its sponsoring Governments $137 billion to date, a fact that was admitted by one of its agents, former Prime Minister of Qatar Hamad bin Jassim bin Jaber bin Muhammad Al-Thani. Just a few days ago, he admitted to the media that the terrorist war was a joint plan that united his country with Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the United States, Israel and Jordan. For those Governments, Syria and its people were simply prey to a fighting pack of hyenas. In the words of Mr. Al-Thani himself, "we fought over the prey and it ran away as we fought over it".

The Syrian Arab Republic rejects the form and content of the report of the Joint Investigative Mechanism, because of the accusations it has made regarding the painful incident in Khan Shaykhun. My country will not allow its thousand-year-old civilization to become a prey or target to the Governments that sponsor terrorism. We will continue our war on terrorism. We will rebuild our country. We will achieve the ambitions of our citizens with our blood, sweat and tears, and with the support of our friends who respect international law and reject any breach of the Charter of the United Nations. We will stand and fight the policies of domination that support terrorism.

The meeting rose at 5.50 p.m.